

The Artist Writing

There are many approaches to writing and, of course, none of them is “The Definitive Correct Way”.

I follow Toby Litt’s Substack articles and I recommend him, he’s always interesting.

A couple of times Humble Bundle has offered bundles of books about “how to write”. I buy them if I like the registered charity they’ve chosen but such books tend to be of little use to me because they are aimed at writers who would like to be in the bestseller lists and that isn’t me.

The bestseller lists are a part of the commercial world. They list writers who are the best at selling a product. The book as a tin of soup, the book as a unit of commercialism, the book as a grocery item.

Sometimes a book on the bestseller list may coincidentally contain really good writing, brilliant thoughts, stimulating ideas, splendid entertainment. There’s also the possibility, however, that the bestseller list may contain packets of utter drivel, boxes of the stupid, tin cans of the banal, money off, special offer, multibuy family packs of the shallow. So I glance through some of these instruction manuals on how to write and the advice isn’t particularly bad. It just isn’t relevant to the way I work and the results which I’m trying to achieve.

I write as an artist. My writing is equivalent to drawing, painting, sculpting or any other serious art form. I’m putting words on the page in the same mood as I would put pencil lines on the sketch paper or brush strokes on the canvas. I carry skillsets from fine art over into word manipulation.

I say “serious” art form but the seriousness is in the method and the diligence of the work. Sometimes I will create a piece which is intended to be comical and I draw no hard, uncrossable line between humour and drama. Real life has very blurry edges between the funny and the heartrending and so art shouldn’t make false barriers between different types of human feeling either. We should allow our writing to be informed by our experience of real life.

I sometimes adopt special styles as an effect and sometimes even different styles on the same page. I wrote one piece called “Science of Fiction” in which I changed style continually throughout the page. From fairy tales to Gurdjieff to James Joyce to Victorian novelist to Terry Pratchett, just as an experiment or for the sheer hell of it.

I am dedicated to non-commercialism. I know I will never be on any bestseller list because, for one reason, I don’t charge anyone any money and I’m not selling a product. Perhaps there should be a “notseller list” and then I could aspire to one day be on that?

Don't get me wrong. I'm not against commercial product selling. I simply don't want to be creating a saleable product. I know that if I wrote with an eye on a cash register then my writing would be different. I would be discarding sentences which "don't sell" and replacing them with sentences more likely to encourage the consumer to keep consuming my brand. The end result of working in that way would be books which are very much like other books you've read before. Similar products. Conforming slavishly to known genres.

Thankfully the commercial world has made a little niche in which my kind of writing can exist.

They've called it names like "genre busting" or "off the grid" and they have graciously allowed that we might be of some value even if not for the mainstream. They even allow writers like me to be giving away our works for no money. We still have value to the ruling capitalist system because we add to the general pool of thoughts and ideas and someone might be inspired by the work of an "art for art sake" writer like me and pick up an idea which they can then turn into a million dollars.

Well, good luck to them, kushti bok, I'll carry on rambling across the hinterland of wordsmithing.